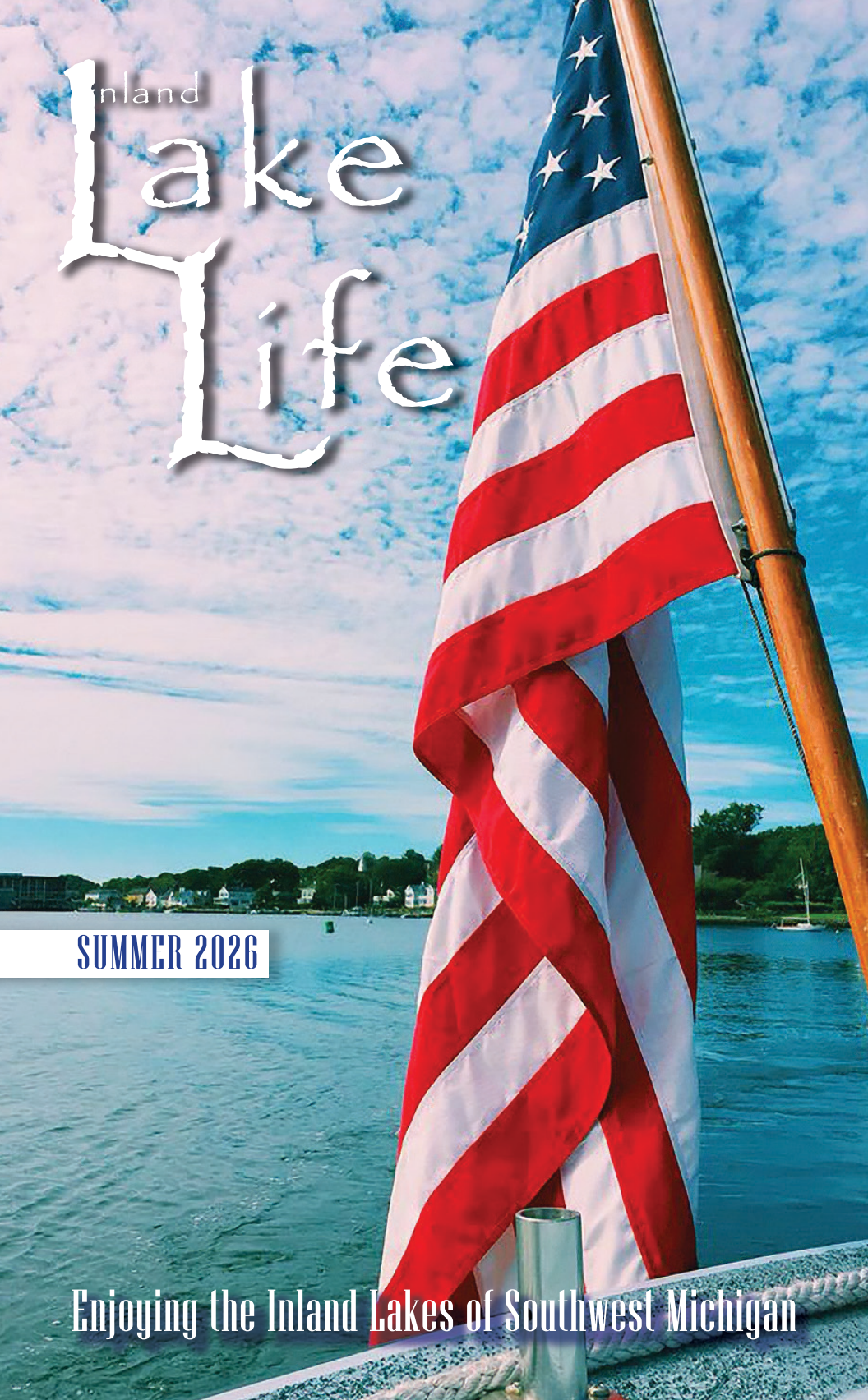
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(269) 934-2583
jeff@mailmaxonline.com

President: Glen Head
Publisher: Jeff Painter
Ad Sales: Kate Marie
Graphic Design: Brook Reddel

Molly Nate

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In 2026, the United States of America marks a historic milestone—250 years since the birth of a nation founded on the ideals of freedom, liberty, and self-governance. From the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776 to today, America's story has been one of courage, sacrifice, and an unwavering belief in opportunity.

When our founding fathers gathered in Philadelphia, they could hardly have imagined the nation their bold vision would create. What began as a declaration against tyranny became the foundation for one of the most enduring democracies in the world. Through times of triumph and challenge—from the Revolutionary War to modern day—America has remained guided by the principles set forth at its founding: that all people are created equal and endowed with certain unalienable rights.

As we celebrate this 250th anniversary, it's important to reflect not only on the great events that shaped our nation, but also on the everyday freedoms we enjoy—freedoms that generations of Americans have fought to preserve. The ability to gather with family, to explore the outdoors, and to build a life of our choosing are all part of that enduring legacy.

Here in our lake communities, those freedoms are on full display. The American spirit has always been closely tied to the land and water—from early settlers navigating rivers and lakes to today's families enjoying time on the shoreline. There is something deeply patriotic about the simple act of being on the water, where independence and adventure meet.

The lake has long been a place where American traditions come to life. On summer evenings, the glow of a sunset over the water mirrors the pride we feel for our country. On the Fourth of July, the celebration of Independence Day takes on special meaning as fireworks light up the sky and reflect across the lake's surface—a powerful reminder of the freedoms we often take for granted.

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But this anniversary is more than a look back—it's a call to carry forward the values that have defined our nation for 250 years. It's about honoring those who came before us while inspiring future generations to appreciate and protect the freedoms they inherit. Whether through service, community involvement, or simply sharing in time-honored traditions, each of us plays a role in America's ongoing story.

Communities across the country will commemorate this milestone with parades, ceremonies, and celebrations, honoring the rich history and bright future of the United States. Yet, some of the most meaningful tributes won't be found in grand events, but in the quiet moments—families gathered on docks, friends sharing stories by the water, and neighbors coming together in appreciation of the life we're fortunate to live.

At its core, America's 250th anniversary is a celebration of freedom—not just as an idea, but as a way of life. It's the freedom to explore new horizons, to create lasting memories, and to enjoy the beauty of the world around us.

So as you spend time at the lake this season, take a moment to reflect on the legacy of the United States. For 250 years, this nation has stood as a beacon of hope and opportunity. And here, on the water, surrounded by family, friends, and tradition, we are reminded of exactly what that freedom looks like.

Here's to 250 years of America—and to the generations who will carry its story forward.

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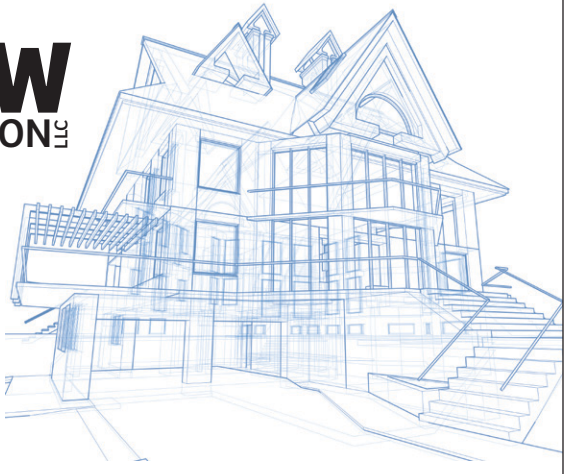

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The Homeowner's Guide to Whole Home Generators

Power outages have become more frequent and unpredictable, leaving many homeowners searching for reliable backup solutions. Whole home generators offer a seamless way to maintain electricity during storms, grid failures, or other disruptions. These systems automatically detect outages and supply power to essential circuits throughout the house, providing peace of mind without the hassle of extension cords or manual startup.

Whole home generators, also known as standby generators, differ significantly from portable models. While portable units require manual connection and fuel monitoring, standby generators install permanently outside the home and connect directly to the electrical panel. They run on natural gas, propane, or diesel and activate within seconds of a power loss. Most systems include an automatic transfer switch that safely isolates the home from the grid and shifts the load to generator power.

Selecting the right generator begins with calculating power needs. Homeowners should list critical appliances and systems, such as refrigerators, furnaces, well pumps, sump pumps, medical equipment, lighting, and security systems. A typical household might require between 10 and 22 kilowatts, though larger homes with multiple air conditioning units or electric heat can demand 30 kilowatts or more. Undersizing leads to frequent overloads, while oversizing increases unnecessary fuel consumption and upfront costs. Professional load calculations ensure accurate sizing.

Installation involves more than simply placing the unit. Generators require a concrete pad for stability, proper clearance from windows and doors for ventilation, and connection to the home's fuel supply. Natural gas models tie into existing utility lines, offering unlimited runtime as long as the supply remains intact. Propane tanks provide an alternative for areas without natural gas service but need periodic refilling.

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Diesel units deliver high power density but involve more maintenance and fuel storage considerations. Local building codes and utility regulations often dictate placement, electrical connections, and permitting requirements.

Maintenance plays a crucial role in long-term reliability. Manufacturers recommend exercising the generator weekly or monthly under load to keep internal components lubricated and batteries charged. Annual professional servicing includes oil and filter changes, spark plug inspection, coolant checks, and battery testing. Many modern units feature remote monitoring through smartphone apps, alerting owners to potential issues before they escalate. Neglecting routine care can reduce lifespan and increase the risk of failure during an actual outage.

Fuel management deserves careful attention. Natural gas eliminates storage worries but depends on pipeline integrity during widespread emergencies. Propane tanks should maintain adequate levels, especially before storm season. Homeowners in remote areas may benefit from dual-fuel configurations or larger underground tanks. Understanding consumption rates helps estimate runtime and plan accordingly.

Cost considerations extend beyond the purchase price. A complete whole home system, including installation and transfer switch, typically ranges from several thousand to tens of thousands of dollars depending on capacity and features. Factors influencing price include generator brand, kilowatt rating, enclosure type for noise reduction, and smart technology integration. While the initial investment appears substantial, many homeowners recoup value through avoided food spoilage, business continuity, and protection of sensitive electronics. Some insurance policies offer discounts for installed backup power.

Noise levels and aesthetics matter for residential settings. Modern generators incorporate sound-attenuating enclosures that reduce operation to conversational volumes at typical distances. Placement away from living areas and bedrooms minimizes disturbance. Weather-resistant housings protect against elements while blending with landscaping when possible.

Whole home generators represent a significant step toward energy independence. They eliminate the stress of sudden blackouts, preserve refrigerated medications and food, and allow families to continue normal routines. As climate patterns shift and grid demands grow, these systems provide a practical safeguard for essential modern living.

Homeowners considering a generator can consult BOSS Services or another licensed professional for site assessment, sizing, and installation. Proper planning ensures the system performs reliably when needed most, transforming potential disasters into minor inconveniences. With thoughtful selection and diligent upkeep, a whole home generator becomes a silent guardian of comfort and security.

Flooring Trends for 2026.

Fresh inspiration is sweeping through the flooring and tile industry, as showcased at *Coverings*, North America's largest international tile show. Spanning miles of exhibits from around the world, the event highlighted key design directions shaping homes and commercial spaces in 2026.

Color & Tone

Color continues to take center stage, with rich jewel tones—especially blues and greens—leading the way. From soft sky hues to bold emerald and turquoise, these shades are appearing on walls and increasingly in smaller floor patterns like penny rounds and hex mosaics. Meanwhile, whites are warming up, shifting toward softer tones like Pantone's "Cloud Dancer." Clean, serene spaces inspired by Scandinavian design remain popular, often paired with natural wood accents. Metallic finishes in gold, bronze, copper, and silver are also making a comeback, used in both polished and matte applications for either elegance or contrast.

Texture & Dimension

Designers are embracing texture to add depth and character. Surfaces inspired by leather, linen, and stitched fabrics bring subtle detail to monochromatic spaces. Fluted and sculpted tiles create dramatic dimension, particularly in commercial settings like retail walls and counters. Organic, handcrafted looks—with uneven, raw finishes—are trending strongly, often influenced by Japanese design principles that highlight natural imperfection.

Stone Trends

Natural stone is seeing a resurgence, especially with linear sculpted details resembling vertical beadboard. Deep green tones and bold, veined stones are gaining popularity, particularly in larger formats like 18x36 tiles. These statement pieces are often used for feature walls, showcasing striking combinations like lilac or caramel veining against soft white backgrounds.

Technology & Performance

Advancements in porcelain technology are elevating realism. New 3D innovations allow textures to align perfectly with visual patterns, creating surfaces that closely mimic natural materials. In residential spaces, this effect remains subtle, while commercial applications often feature more pronounced textures.

Vinyl & Carpet Trends

Waterproof vinyl plank flooring continues its strong growth, especially in larger 9x60-inch formats. Thicker options provide added comfort, while improved embossing techniques enhance wood realism. Warmer wood tones are emerging alongside traditional white oak. Waterproof laminates are also gaining traction for their durability and scratch resistance. In carpet, the "coastal look" remains popular, featuring low, tight constructions and subtle patterns that balance softness with durability.

I hope some of these new exciting options will enhance your personal design choices and find a place in your home.

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Eau Claire, Michigan: A Small Town with Deep Roots

Tucked quietly into the heart of Berrien County, the village of Eau Claire may be small in size, but its history runs deep with the kind of character and resilience that defines Southwest Michigan. Long before it became the peaceful rural community we know today, Eau Claire was built on hard work, fertile land, and the determination of early settlers looking to carve out a life in a new frontier.

The story of Eau Claire begins in the mid-1800s, when pioneers were drawn to the area by its rich soil and access to nearby waterways. Properly pronounced "oh-CLAIR," the name means "clear water" in French and reflects the natural beauty that first attracted settlers—clean streams, open land, and a landscape full of promise. Farming quickly became the backbone of the community, and it remains a defining part of the area's identity to this day.

As agriculture flourished, so did the need for connection. The arrival of the railroad in the late 19th century transformed Eau Claire from a quiet farming settlement into a small but active hub of trade and transport. Crops grown in the surrounding fields—especially fruit, grains, and

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Eau Claire, Michigan *Continued from 12*

vegetables—could now be shipped efficiently to larger markets, helping local farmers expand their reach and secure their livelihoods.

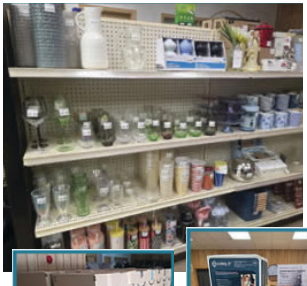
Like many towns in Southwest Michigan, Eau Claire became part of the region's celebrated "Fruit Belt." The nearby influence of Lake Michigan created a unique microclimate ideal for growing apples, peaches, and other crops. Orchards dotted the countryside, and harvest season brought a sense of energy and purpose that still echoes in the area today.

But beyond its agricultural success, Eau Claire has always been defined by its people. Generations of families have lived, worked, and grown together here, building a close-knit community where neighbors know each other by name and traditions are passed down year after year. Local schools, churches, and small businesses have long served as gathering places, reinforcing the town's strong sense of identity.

Over time, as highways replaced railroads and larger cities expanded, Eau Claire remained rooted in its small-town values. While the world around it changed, the village held onto the qualities that made it special—quiet streets, open fields, and a slower pace of life that feels increasingly rare today.

For those who live along the inland lakes and rural roads of this part of Michigan, Eau Claire represents something meaningful. It's a reminder of where the region started—before the cottages, before the summer crowds, before lake life became a destination. It's a place where the land still matters, where history isn't just remembered but lived every day.

Today, Eau Claire stands as a testament to the enduring spirit of small-town America. It may not be the biggest dot on the map, but for those who know it, it's a place filled with history, heart, and a quiet pride that continues to carry it forward.



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A New Chapter at Lakeview Inn

Familiar faces, fresh touches, and a century of lakeside tradition in Sister Lakes.

Glen & Shelly Head

Glen: Nestled in a cottage-lined neighborhood on the northeast side of Big Crooked Lake sits a historic pub that has been serving the Sister Lakes community for more than a century. **Lakeview Inn** is a storied eatery that has turned a new page, now owned by longtime team members **Courtney and Katy Young**.

"Both Katy and I have been working here for over 12 years," Courtney shared. "In December, we had the opportunity to become the new owners. We've kept most of the menu that's made this place endure for so long, but Katy's added some extra flair to a few dishes."

Lakeview Inn offers two distinct settings. The bar area leans cozy-cabin, while the spacious enclosed patio opens up to lake views. Powered see-through panels can be raised or lowered depending on the weather—letting in those fresh lake breezes while extending the dining season well beyond summer.

We kicked things off with a towering stack of **Onion Rings**—a longtime favorite. Thick-cut sweet onions are hand-dipped in a batter recipe passed down through the years. The crisp bite says it all, and the house-made ranch seals the deal. One ring in, and you'll understand the legend status.

Reuben sandwiches are on my regular rotation, and this one delivered. Katy's house brine keeps the corned beef tender, extra juicy and noticeably less salty than most, letting the flavors shine. Paired with seasoned fries that carry just the right amount of zip, it's a combo worth repeating.

Continued on 16

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An ultra-tender 8 oz. sirloin steals the show on the **Black and Blue Salad**. Rich, beefy flavor meets generous chunks of bold blue cheese for a perfect balance of sharp and savory. The house-made blue cheese dressing ties it all together—no shortcuts here.

For the burger-curious (or the burger-brave), the **Skool Daze Smash Burger** is a must. Two smashed patties are topped with peanut butter, jelly, bacon, and fried onion

strings. It sounds like a dare, but it eats like a dream—sweet, salty, silky, and crispy all at once. Served with tater tots, it's a nostalgic trip back to the lunchroom…just significantly upgraded.

Locals rave about the pizza, so we tried the **Buffalo Chicken and Mac**. House-made sweet buffalo sauce meets creamy mac & cheese in a surprisingly balanced pairing. The buffalo doesn't overpower—it complements. And the crust? I'll go on record: one

of the best in Van Buren County. Crisp where it should be, soft and yeasty on the inside. If you're a crust person, this one's calling your name.

Set your GPS for Lakeview Inn and discover a little lakeside charm with a whole lot of flavor.

Shelly: "Next time, I'm ordering the **Italian Grinder**—because this Italian gal already knows what she wants."

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St. Paul's Episcopal Church: Dowagiac's Living Legacy

St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Dowagiac stands as the oldest public building in the city and once served as its only auditorium, making it a central gathering place in the community's early years. The structure was built in 1859 and quickly became a hub for both civic and cultural events.

Over the years, the church welcomed an impressive list of notable speakers and performers. Women's rights advocates Victoria Woodhull, Belva Lockwood, Anna Shaw, Mary Livermore, and Susan B. Anthony all spoke within its walls, as did renowned civil rights supporter Sojourner Truth. The building also hosted distinguished performers, including celebrated Norwegian violinist Ole Bull, further cementing its role as a cultural landmark in Southwest Michigan.

Although the building was constructed in the mid-19th century, Episcopalians did not begin regularly meeting there until 1897. The church's Romanesque-style exterior has remained largely unchanged, preserving its historic character. Inside, however, the sanctuary underwent significant renovation in 1959, when Dom Francis Bacon, O.S.B. (1903–1967), introduced intricate mosaics and decorative elements inspired by early Christian churches.

The Episcopal presence in the region dates back even earlier. The first recorded Episcopal gathering in Cass County was led by Bishop Philander Chase in 1832. By 1858, under the guidance of Trinity Church in Niles, the first Episcopal services were formally held in Dowagiac.

Today, St. Paul's remains a powerful symbol of the city's rich history, reflecting both its architectural heritage and its role in shaping community life.

Local Couple Quit Their Jobs

When **Allison Gillespie** and her husband **Nick** left their corporate careers, they weren't just starting a business. They were setting out to build a better mattress, right here in Michigan.

"We like to say we're the anti-mattress store," Allison says. "No fake sales, no pressure, just a really pleasant shopping experience. We wanted to do things better…the right way."

That philosophy carries through every part of the business, including the product itself. **Rested Pillow designs its own line of mattresses**, built exclusively for their customers. Each one is **handcrafted in Grand Ledge, Michigan** by Capitol Bedding, a family-run company making beds since 1946, including for the Grand Hotel.

"These aren't mass-produced beds you'll find everywhere," Allison says. "They're made just for us, using better materials."

That includes **commercial-grade foams** designed to feel better and last longer. They also offer **flippable mattresses**, something increasingly rare.

"We have four you can try in our showroom," she says. "Flipping and rotating really helps extend the life."

Many models are also **customizable**, with a zipper system that allows you to swap out comfort layers over time.

"You don't have to replace your mattress every 6–8 years," Allison says. "You can refresh it. It truly could be the last mattress you ever buy."

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to Start a Mattress Company

Before starting Rested Pillow, both Allison and Nick worked at Whirlpool Corporation. "It was a leap," Allison says. "But we knew we could create something better, for our customers and our community."

Today, their mattresses are found in homes, Airbnbs, and local stays like Ambrose Bed & Breakfast and Sandblox Resort. Rested Pillow is also the **#1 rated mattress store in Michigan**, backed by hundreds of five-star reviews.

"We don't take that lightly," Allison says. "Trust means everything in a purchase like this."

Visit their showroom in St. Joseph, open Tuesday through Saturday. Delivery, setup, and old mattress removal options are available, along with a 100-night comfort guarantee and 10-year warranty.

"At the end of the day," Allison says, "we just want people to have a really good night's rest."

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150 Years of Brewing Tradition: The Legacy of Anheuser-Busch

In 1876, a bold idea took shape in St. Louis, Missouri—one that would grow into one of the most recognizable names in American business. That year marked the founding of what would become Anheuser-Busch, a company whose influence on brewing, marketing, and American culture has spanned a century and a half.

The story begins with Adolphus Busch, a German immigrant with a vision for quality brewing and innovation. Partnering with his father-in-law, Eberhard Anheuser, Busch helped transform a modest brewery into a national powerhouse. Their most famous creation, Budweiser, debuted in 1876 and quickly set a new standard for consistency and taste. Inspired by European brewing traditions but tailored to American palates, Budweiser became known as the "King of Beers"—a title it still carries today.

From the beginning, Anheuser-Busch embraced innovation. It was among the first breweries to use pasteurization and refrigerated railcars, allowing beer to be shipped across the country without losing quality. These advancements helped expand distribution nationwide at a time when most breweries remained local operations. By the early 20th century, the company had firmly established itself as a leader in the industry.

Like many American businesses, Anheuser-Busch faced major challenges during Prohibition in the United States. When the production and sale of alcohol were outlawed, the company pivoted creatively, producing non-alcoholic beverages, yeast products, and even ice cream to stay afloat. This ability to adapt not only kept the business alive but also positioned it for rapid growth when Prohibition ended in 1933.

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In the decades that followed, Anheuser-Busch became synonymous with American advertising excellence. From the iconic Budweiser Clydesdales to memorable Super Bowl commercials, the company mastered the art of storytelling. Its marketing campaigns didn't just sell beer—they built emotional connections with consumers, reinforcing the brand's place in American traditions, celebrations, and everyday life.

The company's influence extended beyond brewing and advertising. Anheuser-Busch has long been committed to community involvement, environmental sustainability, and responsible drinking initiatives. Investments in water conservation, recycling programs, and renewable energy have helped shape modern standards in the beverage industry.

Today, Anheuser-Busch operates as part of Anheuser-Busch InBev, the world's largest brewer. Despite its global reach, the company continues to honor its American roots, with breweries across the country producing some of the most recognizable beer brands in the world.

As Anheuser-Busch celebrates 150 years, its legacy is one of resilience, innovation, and cultural impact. From a small St. Louis brewery to a global icon, the company has remained committed to quality while continually evolving with the times. Its story is not just about beer—it's about entrepreneurship, adaptation, and the enduring spirit of American industry.

Whether enjoyed at a backyard barbecue, a ballgame, or a lakeside gathering, Anheuser-Busch products have been part of countless memories for generations. And as the company looks toward the future, it does so with the same pioneering spirit that defined its past—raising a glass to the next 150 years.

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A Summer of Stage, Story, and Tradition at Beckwith Theatre Company

In the heart of Dowagiac, the Beckwith Theatre Company continues to bring stories to life with a summer lineup filled with history, humor, and the charm of live theatre. For audiences across Southwest Michigan and Northern Indiana, Beckwith remains a community-driven destination where local talent shines.

This season features two standout productions.

The summer opens with the musical ***1776***, a powerful Broadway classic that brings America's founding to life. Performances run June 26 and 27 at 7:30pm, June 28 at 2:00pm, July 3 and 4 at 7:30pm, and July 5 at 2:00pm. With music and lyrics by Sherman Edwards and a book by Peter Stone, the show takes audiences inside the Continental Congress as the Founding Fathers debate independence. Portrayed as real, complex individuals, these historic figures come alive in a story of courage and conviction.

Later in the season, Beckwith presents Neil Simon's classic comedy ***The Sunshine Boys***. Performances take place August 21 and 22 at 7:30pm, August 23 at 2:00pm, August 28 and 29 at 7:30pm, and August 30 at 2:00pm. The play follows two former vaudeville partners whose long-standing feud is tested when they reunite for a television special. Filled with sharp humor and heartfelt moments, it's a timeless story of friendship and second chances.

The Beckwith Theatre Company carries a rich legacy dating back to the late 1800s, when the original Beckwith Memorial The-

Continued on 30

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Beckwith Theater Co. ***Continued from 29***

atre was a regional entertainment landmark. Since its revival in 1990, the current organization has continued that tradition through volunteer-driven productions and community support.

Support from donors plays a vital role in keeping that tradition alive. Contributions help sustain high-quality performances and ongoing improvements through the theatre's capital campaign. Those interested in supporting Beckwith can donate online at beckwiththeatre.com, call 269-782-7653, or email BeckwithTheatreMI@gmail.com.

Beckwith Theatre Company is located at 100 New York Ave., Dowagiac. Tickets and additional information are available at beckwiththeatre.com.

RedBud MX: The Story of America's Motocross Playground

In the rolling hills of Buchanan, Michigan lies a stretch of hallowed ground that has defined the spirit of American motocross for more than half a century. Known around the world as "America's Motocross Track," RedBud MX is more than just a racing circuit—it's a patriotic tradition, a family legacy, and home to some of the most passionate fans in the sport.

The Vision of a "Track n Trail"

The RedBud story began in 1972 when Gene Ritchie, a Pennsylvania native, discovered the potential of the Michigan landscape during a snowmobiling trip. Along with his wife, Nancy, and partners from the Patterson and Miller families, Ritchie purchased property along North Red Bud Trail with a vision that extended far beyond a simple racecourse.

Originally named Red Bud TNT (Track n Trail), the facility paid tribute to the surrounding red bud trees and Buchanan's nickname, "Red Bud City." What started as a modest local track quickly gained traction. By 1973, the first races were underway, drawing riders from across the region. Just one year later, on April 28, 1974, RedBud hosted its first professional AMA National—an event that would mark the beginning of its rise to national prominence. That day, riders Mike Hartwig and Ken Zahrt became the first professional winners on RedBud soil.

A Fourth of July Institution

While many tracks host races, RedBud hosts a holiday. Since 1978, the RedBud National has been held on Independence Day weekend, transforming the race into one of the most iconic traditions in motorsports. The now-famous "REDBUUUUUUD!" chant rises from the crowd in a thunderous roar, echoing across the hills and becoming a defining soundtrack of the event.

Continued on 32

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Each year, the celebration draws an estimated 30,000 to 40,000 spectators, turning Buchanan into the epicenter of motocross. For one weekend, the small-town atmosphere gives way to a vibrant, festival-like energy. During international events like the Motocross of Nations, attendance has reached nearly 60,000 fans, making it one of the most attended motocross races in U.S. history. Campers fill the facility's expansive grounds, and families return year after year, creating traditions of their own.

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The Leap of Legend

No story about RedBud is complete without LaRocco's Leap.

Introduced in 1991, this massive uphill triple jump stretches roughly 120 feet, challenging even the most skilled riders. Named after local legend Mike LaRocco—the first to consistently clear it—the jump has become a symbol of courage, precision, and the relentless pursuit of excellence.

Over the decades, LaRocco's Leap has separated the good from the great. For fans, it's one of the most anticipated moments of every race. For riders, it's a defining test—one that demands both confidence and commitment.

Taking the Global Stage

RedBud's reputation extends far beyond American borders.

The track reached new heights when it hosted the Motocross of Nations—often referred to as the "Olympics of Motocross"—in 2018. The world's best riders gathered in Buchanan, showcasing the track on an international stage. When the event returned in 2022, Team USA delivered a historic performance, capturing victory on home soil and ending an 11-year winless streak.

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These global moments further solidified RedBud's reputation as one of the premier motocross venues in the world—respected not only for its layout, but for its unmatched atmosphere.

A Lasting Legacy

Following the passing of Gene Ritchie in 2016, the track was entrusted to his children, Tim and Amy Ritchie, who continue to carry forward his vision. Under their leadership, RedBud has remained true to its roots while continuing to evolve with the sport.

From professional nationals to large-scale amateur events, the facility remains a gathering place for riders of all ages and skill levels. It's a place where generations come together—where first-time racers share the same dirt as seasoned professionals, and where families build memories that last a lifetime.

After celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2023, RedBud MX stands as a testament to vision, perseverance, and passion. It is a place where legends are made, where limits are tested, and where the unmistakable roar of American motocross continues to echo through the hills.

Sources: RedBud MX, AMA Pro Motocross, and historical motocross archives

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41 Years of Farming: The Story of J.W. Morlock & Girls

J.W. Morlock& Girls, LLC logo reflects the hard work that owners Jeffrey and Debra Morlock have achieved in their agricultural endeavors. The logo was also a symbol of what their agricultural operation was missing, a tractor and farmland. Therefore, J.W. Morlock & Girls was established on rented ground and borrowed equipment in 1983. Apples, raspberries, strawberries, peaches, plums, tomatoes, melons, and green beans were a few of the agricultural commodities that Jeffrey and Debra grew on their rented farmland and sold to area farm stands and markets.

J.W. Morlock & Girls, LLC would eventually grow in size and number of commodities being produced. Today, Jeffrey, Debra and their three girls (Melissa, Stephanie & Amanda) are farming over 180 acres in their hometown of Watervliet, Michigan. In 2007, J.W. Morlock & Girls, LLC expanded from selling their homegrown produce at grocery stores, processors, farmers markets and restaurants to opening their own roadside fruit stand on M-140 in Watervliet, Michigan. You can now purchase over 40 different mouthwatering varieties of fruits and vegetables between the months of May-September, all homegrown & handpicked from J.W. Morlock

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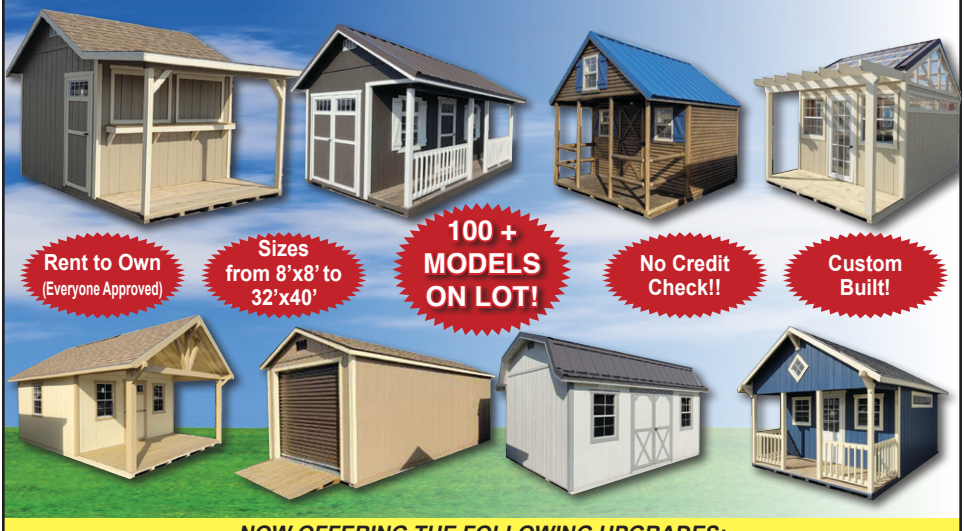

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& Girls LLC. In 2016, a new addition was added inside of the farm stand called Mo'e Pies, LLC. Mo'e Pies is a bakery selling handmade pies that are handcrafted using their homegrown fruit from the family farm.

Jeffrey and Debra's vision has grown into much more than owning their own equipment and farmland. They have been able to continue to bring the freshest handpicked produce from their family farm to your family's table. JW Morlock & Girls, LLC is celebrating their 41st year of farming!

How is your operation unique?

A farming family made up almost entirely of women, the team at J.W. Morlock & Girls LLC takes great pride in their produce. They strive to educate their consumers on the quality and taste of fresh-picked fruits and vegetables. As the farming season progresses, their stand will be overflowing with all their homegrown tasty produce grown on the family farm.

Customers always joke with us that we should be called The Girls and JW. Jeff and I were blessed with three girls (Melissa, Stephanie, and Amanda) who have helped run all the operations of our business.

In a typical farming operation, one thinks of the women taking care of the children, making dinner, and doing the bookwork while the husband tends to the farm. In our operation, all jobs are fair game. Our daughters learned early on how to plant, pick, drive a tractor and all the other tasks that come along with farming. I believe that this makes us a unique operation. Teamwork and interchangeable roles make our operation efficient. Our daughters will continue to preserve the lessons that they have learned on the family farm as they pass down their work ethic to the next generation. As you can see in our social media posts, our grandchildren are immersed in agricultural education daily. The whole family looks forward to seeing you at the farm stand!

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A Day on the Lake: Living at Its Finest

There's something special about waking up on a lake in Southwest Michigan. Before the first boat cuts across the water and before the day fully comes to life, there's a stillness that feels almost timeless. The lake sits calm—like glass—reflecting soft shades of pink, orange, and blue as the sun begins to rise.

For many, this quiet moment is the best part of the day.

Coffee tastes better on the dock. Whether you're overlooking Paw Paw Lake, Magician Lake, or one of the many smaller hidden gems tucked throughout the county, mornings start slow and simple. A light breeze moves across the water. A fish breaks the surface in the distance. Maybe it's a quick cast off the end of the pier, hoping for bluegill or bass, or maybe it's just sitting still, taking it all in.

It's a peaceful start—but it doesn't stay that way for long.

Midday: Sun, Speed & Time Well Spent

By late morning, the lake begins to wake up. The quiet hum of early risers gives way to the unmistakable sound of boat engines, laughter, and the energy of a summer day in full swing.

On Paw Paw Lake—the largest inland lake in the region—activity picks up quickly. Pontoons loaded with family and friends cruise across the open water, while wake boats carve smooth lines behind them. Kids hang on tight as tubes bounce across the waves, their laughter echoing from one shoreline to the next.

Other lakes throughout Southwest Michigan offer a slightly different pace. On places like Van Auken Lake or Pipestone Lake, the atmosphere is often a bit more relaxed. You'll still find boats and plenty of activity, but there's a balance—space to enjoy the water without the constant motion.

No matter the lake, midday is about being outside and making the most of it.

Swimming becomes a must as the sun climbs higher. Some jump off the end of the dock, others ease in from a sandy shoreline. Boats anchor in small groups, and what starts as separate outings often turns into shared moments. It's common to see neighbors pull up alongside each other, turning a simple afternoon into an impromptu gathering.

This is lake life at its core—unplanned, easy, and built around connection.

Continued on 38

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A Day on the Lake *Continued from 37*

Afternoon: Relaxation & Lakefront Living

As the afternoon settles in, the pace begins to shift again. The peak energy of midday gives way to a more relaxed rhythm.

Boats return to their lifts. Wet towels hang over railings. The focus moves from the water to the shoreline, where lakefront living truly shines.

Grills fire up across the lake, filling the air with the unmistakable smell of summer. Music drifts from decks and patios, never too loud, just enough to add to the atmosphere. People gather in backyard spaces designed for exactly this purpose—comfortable seating, shaded areas, and a clear view of the water just steps away.

In Southwest Michigan, lake homes aren't just houses—they're gathering places. It's not uncommon for neighbors to arrive by boat, tying up at the dock for what starts as a quick visit and turns into hours of conversation. There's a sense of openness here, a community built not just on proximity, but on shared lifestyle.

For others, the afternoon is quieter. A nap in a hammock. A book in hand while sitting lakeside. Feet dipped in the water without a single thought of rushing anywhere. These slower moments are just as important as the high-energy parts of the day.

Because lake life isn't about doing more—it's about enjoying more.

Evening: Golden Hour & Last Rides

As the sun begins its slow descent, something shifts once again. The light softens. The air cools slightly. And the lake takes on a golden glow that feels almost unreal.

This is the time when people head back out for "one more ride." Whether it's a slow cruise on a pontoon or a final run across open water, the evening hours offer some of the most memorable moments of the day.

On lakes like Round, the wider open water creates the perfect setting for long sunset cruises. On smaller lakes, the reflections feel even more intimate—trees, homes, and sky mirrored perfectly on the surface.

Back at the dock, others choose to stay still and watch it all unfold.

The sky shifts from gold to deep orange, then to shades of purple and blue. The lake reflects every bit of it, doubling the beauty. It's quiet again—but not the same quiet as morning. This one feels earned, like the natural close to a full and satisfying day.

Nightfall: Fireside & Reflections

As darkness settles in, the lake transforms one final time. Lights from homes and cottages shimmer across the water. The occasional boat passes quietly, its navigation lights glowing against the dark surface. Conversations grow softer, more relaxed.

Bonfires become the centerpiece of the night. Chairs circle around the fire as families and friends gather once more. The crackle of burning wood replaces the sounds of the day.

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Stories are shared—some from years past, others from just hours earlier. Kids roast marshmallows while adults sit back and take in the moment.

There's no rush to end the day. In many ways, this is when people slow down enough to truly appreciate where they are. The distractions are gone. The noise has faded. What's left is simple—good company, a beautiful setting, and the quiet understanding that this is what summer is supposed to feel like.

More Than Just a Day

A day on the lake in Southwest Michigan isn't defined by any single moment. It's not just the sunrise or the boat ride or the sunset—it's the combination of all of it.

It's the early morning calm.
The midday excitement.
The relaxed afternoons.
The golden evenings.
And the peaceful nights that follow.

Together, they create something more than just a schedule—they create a lifestyle.

For many, these lakes have become a tradition passed down through generations. Families return year after year. Kids grow up learning to swim, fish, and navigate the water, eventually bringing their own families back to the same shores.

For others, it's a newer discovery—a place that quickly feels like home, even if it's only for weekends or a few months each year.

Either way, the feeling is the same. Because life on the lake isn't about escaping—it's about arriving. Arriving at a place where time slows down, where connections come easier, and where the simplest moments often become the most meaningful.

In Southwest Michigan, that experience is waiting on every shoreline. And once you've lived it—even for a single day—it's hard to imagine summer any other way.

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St. Joseph Youth Achieves DNR Master Angler Recognition

Eleven-year-old Griffin Gillespie of St. Joseph recently landed an impressive catch on the St. Joseph River, earning recognition through Michigan's Department of Natural Resources Master Angler program.

Griffin caught a 31-inch channel catfish on March 31, 2026. The fish is estimated to have weighed between 17 and 20 pounds, qualifying him for the state's Master Angler patch, which he received on April 17.

The memorable catch came during a spring break outing with his dad, Nick, making the achievement even more special. The pair were fishing through Gold Coast Fishing Company, where they were guided by Captain Todd, owner of the charter, who Griffin's family described as "fantastic."

The Master Angler program recognizes anglers who catch fish meeting established size benchmarks, celebrating both skill and dedication to the sport. Open to anglers of all ages, the program encourages participation in Michigan's rich fishing tradition while promoting conservation and responsible angling practices.

The St. Joseph River is well known for its diverse fish population, including channel catfish, salmon, steelhead, and bass, making it a popular destination for anglers throughout the year. Griffin's catch highlights not only his accomplishment but also the quality fishing opportunities available right here in Southwest Michigan.

For a young angler, earning Master Angler recognition is no small feat—and for Griffin, it's likely just the beginning of many more memorable days on the water.

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Mathews
TRAEGER WOOD FIRED GRILLS
EGO
weber
YETI
RAVIN CROSSBOWS
comcast xfinity
ups
Roku

Hale's Family ACE Hardware Est. 1958

Our store has seen quite a few changes over these past 67 years. Going from a small 5,000 sq ft store in the same building we are in now to our current 20,000 sq ft space. As businesses closed and moved out of our building we purchased those spaces, knocked down the walls and remodeled the space. Remodeling our building and expanding over the years has allowed us to bring in products and services that might not be available in other stores, such as a large Gift department with every day gifts for men and women. We are a UPS shipper. We have an electronics department with cell phone accessories, bluetooth speakers, headphones and ear buds. We have a large paint department and custom match colors. We have a large Sporting Goods department with hand guns, rifles, e-bikes, so many hunting accessories, and an Archery Pro Shop with a Shooting Range and the experts to fine tune your skills.

We continue to offer services such as custom window screens, windows screen and glass repair, mower blade sharpening, lopper, shears, knives and scissor sharpening, pipe cutting and threading, custom paint color matching, rekeying locks and automotive security key duplicating, It's been great to be a part of this community and we would like to thank YOU - Dowagiac and all the surrounding areas - for all the support over the years AND we will continue to support you as well!

56216 M-51 S Dowagiac, MI • Phone: 782-3426
Open Daily 8am - 7pm Mon. - Sat. & 8:30am- 5pm Sunday